SEDIMENT MANAGEMENT PLAN
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)
Department of Public Works

What is a debris basin?
Debris Basins are key components of the Los Angeles County Flood Control District's flood control system. Typically located at the mouths of canyons, debris basins capture sediment, gravel, boulders, and vegetative debris that are washed out of the canyons during storms but allow water to flow into the downstream storm drain system, thereby protecting drainage systems and communities in lower-lying watershed areas from possible flooding and property damage.

How many debris basins and other debris retention facilities does the Flood Control District have?
The District has more than 160 permanent debris basins and recently installed 10 temporary debris barriers in five major burn areas. Within the Station Fire burn area alone, there are 28 debris basins protecting several foothill communities.

How much material will need to be removed from debris basins during the 2009/2010 storm season?
The District has already removed close to 800,000 cubic yards of material from its debris retention facilities. (One cubic yard is roughly the size of a typical washing machine. The Rose Bowl in Pasadena would hold about 400,000 cubic yards.) The District expects to remove another 500,000 cubic yards during the current season for a total of 1.3 million cubic yards of sediment. According to storm season projections, the District will need to dispose of an estimated 1.2 million cubic yards of material each storm season for the next 3-5 years, as watersheds affected by the recent wildfires recover.

Where is the removed material taken to?
Much of the material removed from debris basins is transported to sediment placement sites. There are currently 25 active sediment placement sites within the District. These sites are strategically placed in close proximity to District infrastructure to make the process of debris relocation and removal more efficient and to reduce transportation costs. In many cases, sediment placement sites are mandated by the state to service a particular flood protection facility, as is the case with several of the District's dams and reservoirs.

Why doesn't the Flood Control District use landfills to dispose of debris material?
The District currently uses several local landfills as part of its emergency plan for sediment disposal. Often, this material is used as daily cover by landfill operators, in compliance with federal law. However, transportation costs, tipping fees and the loss of

landfill capacity for solid waste disposal make this a costly and less desirable alternative.

Is sediment material toxic or dangerous to human health?
Most of the District's debris protection facilities are located above developed areas. Consequently, the sediment retained within these structures is mostly from undeveloped watersheds that contain naturally occurring materials.

What steps are being taken to mitigate the impact of truck traffic on residential streets near debris basins and sediment placement sites?
For routine cleanouts, the District limits the hours of its operation and extends the duration of its cleanout schedule to ease the impacts of truck traffic. The District also works closely to identify multiple haul routes, alternating the use of transit corridors to alleviate traffic impacts. *During emergency cleanouts, limiting the hours of operation or lengthening the duration of the cleanouts may not be feasible if the result is not being able to ready facilities for the next storm event.* Call (800) 675-HELP with comments or concerns about cleanout operations.

What safeguards are in place to prevent sediment placement sites from collapsing?
The deposit of material in a sediment placement site is performed in accordance with site-specific, engineered grading plans and an erosion and sediment control plan. This involves a comprehensive review of the sediment placement site, proper placement and compaction of material (often carried out in several phases), installation of temporary and permanent drainage structures and positioning of perimeter controls. The District's careful oversight of this process includes measures to prevent negative impacts to water quality.

What happens to a sediment placement site once it has reached capacity?
Depending on a site's logistical characteristics, it will be retired from District use to become open space or recycled for future use by the District. Recycling the site involves removing sediment for other uses, thus restoring some or all of its initial capacity.

What impact has the Station Fire had on the Flood Control District's sediment management plan?
The 2009 Station Fire was the largest wildfire in Los Angeles County history. Impact to the District's sediment management plan was compounded by the immense volume of debris and sediment flowing from the freshly burned watersheds of the Station Fire and the residual effects of the Merek, Sesnon and Sayre Fires, which occurred in the fall of 2008.

The number of debris retention facilities impacted by the Station Fire and the volume of sediment that needed to be excavated to keep debris basins operational during the storm season resulted in the increased use of sediment placement sites in Sylmar and the use of three additional sediment placement sites in Tujunga, Glendale and La

Crescenta. As a result, the La Crescenta sediment placement site was completely filled by the end of 2009, and the sites in Glendale and Tujunga are nearing their capacity.

What is the planning/permitting process for use of a sediment placement site?
To begin using a sediment placement site, the District must obtain permits from federal and state regulatory agencies, which include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, State Regional Water Quality Control Board and State Department of Fish and Game. The District would also coordinate its effort with the local city and community members.

What are the challenges of each sediment placement site?
Moving sediment out of a debris basin requires excavation equipment and numerous dump trucks. As most debris basins are located within residential neighborhoods to protect the lives and property of homeowners, trucks often have to utilize local streets to transport sediment to a placement site or other location authorized for disposal. Sufficient vehicle access, available storage capacity, impact on residential communities, proximity to debris basins and compliance with state and federal environmental safeguards are all challenges faced by the District in the operation of its sediment placement sites.

What authority is granted to the Flood Control District by the Emergency Declaration as it relates to creating new or temporary sediment placement sites?
The Emergency Declaration allows the District to continue with the full scope of its cleanout operations with an emergency exemption from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and directs state agencies to cooperate with the District in its emergency efforts.

How does the Flood Control District determine where a sediment placement site should be?
The District seeks locations that have a large storage capacity for sediment placement. The District also looks for areas that are physically accessible to trucks and reasonably close to District debris retention facilities. Other desirable attributes include locations that are some distance from residences or with access points that do not travel through densely populated residential communities.

Is the Flood Control District investigating additional sediment placement sites or alternative ways for disposing of material?
Yes. The District is looking for sediment placement sites in a number of areas to service its debris retention facilities. However, available sites are extremely limited. One practice of particular advantage to communities is the relocation of sediment to private users with grading permits, cities and other local agencies with projects that require fill material, or landfills needing cover material. The District has followed this practice for more than 50 years with excellent results. The District is seeking to expand this practice while actively pursuing a variety of other avenues for sediment removal and disposal,

including maximizing the potential of existing sediment placement sites and the use of local landfills.